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Harris, Ella (2020) Connecting present moments and present eras with interactive documentary. *Media Theory* 4 (2), pp. 85-114. ISSN 2557-826X.

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Connecting Present Moments and Present Eras with Interactive Documentary

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Media Theory
Vol. 4 | No. 2 | 85-114
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Abstract

Interactive documentary is a non-linear digital form of documentary that allows users numerous pathways through multimedia content. This was the original meaning behind the abbreviation i-docs (Aston and Gaudenzi, 2012) and the sense in which I use the term. While in recent years the ‘i’ has expanded to include immersion, my focus remains on interactivity and nonlinearity. The nonlinearity and multimodality of i-docs are being taken forward into experiments with i-docs as an academic method, including my own.

In this paper I discuss my use of i-docs to study London’s pop-up culture, focusing on two kinds of ‘present’ that i-docs illuminated. First, I explore how working with i-docs elucidated present moments as they are imagined and experienced in pop-up culture: a phenomenon defined by its celebration of ephemerality and unpredictability. Secondly, I explore how the i-doc foregrounded pop-up culture’s role within the present era; revealing pop-up as implicated in politicized processes of urban change in the post 2008 crash climate. Overall, the paper demonstrates how i-docs can make us attentive to both present moments and present eras as well as, crucially, to the relationships between these two kinds of present.

Keywords

Interactive Documentary, Pop-up, Affect, Structure of Feeling, Presents

This paper explores interactive documentary as an approach that can grapple with two kinds of ‘present’, present moments and present eras, as well as, crucially, with the relations between them. Interactive Documentaries, or ‘i-docs’, are defined here

as web based, multimedia documentary productions that can take a range of formats. Most significantly, these kinds of i-docs are nonlinear, offering content that users can navigate through via multiple pathways, as well as various interactive capacities. Interactive documentaries offer a burgeoning creative method within artistic and commercial documentary making worlds. In recent years, there has been an increase in academic communities engaging with them, not only as an object of study but as a methodology too (Aston et al., 2017; Aston & Odorico, 2018, Harris, 2016; Smith & Tyszczuk, 2016). In this paper, I examine how the formal properties of i-docs enable them to evoke and interrogate both the qualities of present moments – the affective atmospheres specific to a certain space-time – as well as those of present eras – the structures of feeling that define a *zeitgeist*.

The paper focuses on interactive documentary as methodology. I discuss an i-doc I made myself about London's pop-up culture (the trend for temporary and mobile place making, most centrally in the leisure and consumption industries). As I explore, the i-doc focused on the localized present moments of pop-up places but also on the structures of feeling that pop-up is part of. Importantly, as I'll illustrate, the process of making my i-doc also illuminated the nonlinear interconnections between present moments and present eras.

Reading Present Moments and Present Eras through Affective Atmospheres and Structures of Feeling

In exploring the present moments of pop-up I build, theoretically, on a recent surge of interest in 'affective atmospheres'; a term that refers to the 'particular feel' or 'tone' of 'sites, episodes or encounters' (Anderson, 2014: 138). Affective atmospheres are collectively felt, although individually differentiated: they involve feelings that belong to and engage a group of people while impacting on each one in unique ways. They are what give situations their specific 'charge' (Anderson, 2014: 139), like the charge felt at a sporting event or in a nightclub. This charge can be political and politicized, as, for example, in the affective atmosphere of hope at the inauguration of America's first black president, Barak Obama (Anderson, 2014: 2).

In conceptualising pop-up's relationship to the present era, I draw on and contribute to a renewed interest in structures of feeling as well as a longstanding body of work on pervasive cultural logics. Raymond Williams captured how certain points in social history have a distinctive sense via his conceptualisation of 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1977: 133), the lived and felt experience of emerging meanings and values in a given era (132). Multiple structures of feeling can co-exist within an era and can be experienced more, less and differently by different social groups within it. There has been a recent resurgence of interest in structures of feeling within which much work identifies precarity as a key structure of feeling today (Anderson, 2014; Berlant, 2011), operating in connection with others such as neoliberalism as a structure of feeling of 'unconstrained submission to administration' (Highmore, 2016: 154) and structures of feeling linked to internet technologies and reality TV 'characterized by an anxious need to talk back, weigh in and be seen' (Hearn, 2010).

For Ben Anderson, structures of feeling, like affective atmospheres, are also affective and work to mediate and condition collective life. However, they function differently to affective atmospheres; setting 'limits' and exerting 'pressure' while an atmosphere, on the other hand, 'surrounds' and 'envelops' (Anderson, 2014: 139). That is to say, as a *structure*, structures of feeling set parameters as to how life is experienced and felt and as to what actions are likely to unfold and how, whereas atmospheres colour a particular situation, encouraging and enhancing feelings and behaviours but without determining durable arrangements and distributions of sense. In considering the structures of feeling that pop-up relates to, I explore structures of feeling as phenomena that, while functioning on the level of the sensory, are akin to a set of logics and assumptions at work in a given era. With regards to pop-up, I see it as instrumental in the structure of feeling of precarity dominant within an era (in the UK setting) that can be loosely demarcated as ensuing from the 2008 crash and persisting up until roughly 2016, from which point a series of events including the UK's vote to leave the European Union, the election of Boris Johnson (2019) and the onset of the Covid-19 Crisis (2020) transmuted this structure of feeling into one of more heightened volatility and absurdity (in an Existential sense).

My treatment of structures of feeling as entailing assumptions and imperatives connects the concept to accounts of cultural logics. For example, Fredric Jameson's

important work on postmodernism and late capitalism used the term ‘cultural logics’ to identify the ways of thinking and feeling distinctive to that socio-economic setting (Jameson, 1991). David Harvey similarly focuses on the spatiotemporal logics and distributions that characterise eras including modernity and postmodernity (Harvey, 1990). These concepts, like structures of feeling, help to elucidate how particular moments in history have distinctive patternings of thinking and feeling, emergent from, and reproductive of, their socio-economic, political and cultural conditions. Put in proximity to structure of feeling, they help to focus on how shared affects and moods contain and shape socio-political agendas and limit what is thought, accepted and encouraged.

Connecting Affective Atmospheres and Structures of Feeling with i-Docs

As well as developing work on affective atmospheres and on structures of feeling distinctly, a key contribution of this paper is illuminating the complex connections between affective atmospheres, as operative in localized present moments, and structures of feeling, as defining and delimiting a given era. I show how, while affective atmospheres can coincide with and reinforce structures of feeling, these two differently scaled affective forces can also be in conflict or contradiction; can undermine or transmute each other as well, or instead of, working in tandem. I illustrate this with reference to the i-doc I built for my doctoral research on pop-up culture which can be accessed at the site www.thetemporarycity.com with the password ‘TTC’. To create the i-doc I worked with a web developer who coded its interface, based on my designs, and embedded the content I made; several short videos as well as collaged image and text boxes made on Photoshop (which I call ‘outside the temporary city boxes’). Here, I show how considering how to express pop-up and its implications through the i-doc’s design necessitated reflection on the specific elements and relations that constitute pop-up’s affective atmospheres. Equally, it necessitated consideration of pop-up’s role in the construction of the present era’s structure of feeling and the socio-economic and political conditions it is rooted in. Crucially, I also show how making the i-doc assisted me in thinking through the entanglements of affective atmospheres and structures of feeling.

As you read this it would be helpful to engage with the i-doc to get a sense of how the features I discuss operate in practice. However, I won't give suggestions to engage with particular parts of the i-doc while reading particular parts of the paper. As a nonlinear medium, each experience of the i-doc is different from the last so it's neither advisable nor possible to try and follow its contents in the order I talk about them. I'll leave it up to the reader how and at what stages they choose to engage with the i-doc but it's useful to remember that its primary purpose in my work was as a methodology rather than an output and my intention in sharing it is to show how its construction enriched my thinking about connections between present moments and present eras.

i-docs: Lineage and Context

Creative media including film or photography have been explored by many scholars as particularly adept at engaging with the qualities of present moments and present eras (Williams, 1977; Jameson, 1991; Harvey, 1990). My use of interactive documentary builds on this tradition, but rather than looking to analyse existing creative media to understand such qualities – as academics more often do – I engage their production as a methodology. For Fredric Jameson, it is in literature and other art forms that structures of feeling are first manifest. Likewise, David Harvey has explored how the logics of a given era are expressed through creative media including how postmodern films like *Blade Runner* capture the compressed space-times and unequal socio-economic structures of late capitalism. The affective atmospheres of localized present moments too, are, as many have explored, well evoked by particular art forms. For example, film scholars have examined how the slow cinema movement engages with the atmospheres of boredom and dead time (Caglayan, 2016; Schoonover, 2012). As I will outline, i-docs, like other media, have been used to engage with both the experience of being present in particular circumstances and with the distinctive qualities of present eras. Their interactive and nonlinear form gives them exciting capacities for engaging with the nuances and complexities of these two kinds of present.

I-docs can be positioned within a wider context of past and contemporary technologies of digital storytelling. The nonlinear formats they engage build on

creative experiments with digital media including those before the advent of Web 2.0 (which foreground participation, user engagement and user generated content). For example, CD-ROM art was an offline format for interactive creative projects, many of which explored concepts of mutability, relationality, agency and multiplicity that are central to interactive documentary today, as noted from the categories of CD-ROM art that made up the exhibition 'Contact Zones' in 1999 (Murray, 1999). CD-ROM art capitalized on the new interactive and nonlinear capacities of CD-ROM technologies and their hypertext format to examine such themes as well as to create a space of encounter for audiences that was at once solitary and collaborative. They also prefigured web-based interactive documentaries by using the limiting functions of interactive technologies, as well as the exploratory and participatory ones, to construct meaning. For example, the piece *Rehearsal of Memory* was a 'navigable composite body made up of skin scans taken from inmates' at a hospital for the criminally insane. Users were invited to explore this composite body but 'only able to do so in ways allowed by the project architecture', so as to 'organize the interactions to undermine the conventional relationships operating between the inmates of such institutions and the general public' as well as to look 'back out at the user', effecting an *escape*' (Bassett, 2007: 103). As in my own work with i-docs and other i-doc projects, *Rehearsal of Memory* uses interactive technologies to foreground power dynamics within the issue depicted – here criminal insanity – by playing with both what interactive technologies enable and what they refuse or constrain in terms of user agency.

More recent experiments with storytelling in nonlinear digital media are mostly online and include 'immersive journalism' and 'news games', alongside i-docs. Sometimes the term i-docs is expanded to include these media, although in this paper I use it in its narrower sense. Mainstream news services like *The Guardian* in the UK and *The New York Times* in the USA have experimented with using virtual reality to 'create deeper engagement and empathy with their audiences' (Laws, 2020: 213). For example, Guardian VR is a section of the Guardian News Outlet specifically for immersive, virtual reality journalism, engaging users in topics including 'A virtual experience of autism' or 'a virtual experience of waiting for asylum.' Interactive news games can similarly put users in the position of vulnerable people such as refugees, migrants or participants in national revolutions in order to engage them with the

complexities, insecurities and ethical ambiguities of decision making in crisis contexts (Plewe & Fursich, 2018; Bogost, et al., 2010). Like i-docs, these interactive, digital forms of factual storytelling seek to foreground nonlinearity and agency. Where i-docs differ from these forms of journalism is that their interfaces normally emphasize the multiplicity and plurality of separated pieces of content from which wider logics, feelings and meanings emerge as the user engages with them.

i-docs; the field

Interactive documentaries are made on a variety of budgets and by multiple kinds of practitioners. They include artistic experiments and academic projects as well as large-budget productions by institutions that have traditionally focused on conventional films or factual content such as the National Film Board of Canada, *The New York Times* and Sundance Institute's New Frontier Lab. Others are being produced by technologically focused institutions such as MIT from their OpenDocLab (Kaufman, 2013). They require relatively large budgets as well as somebody to monitor the sites they're hosted on after the project completion, which can be a barrier to entry for those looking to make interactive documentary work.

Given the claims that interactive documentary makers and theorists make about their capacities for audience engagement and empowerment (Nash, 2014a; Cortes-Selva & Perez-Escolar, 2016), not much is actually known about who engages with i-docs and how (Kaufman, 2013). There have been some academic studies on how audiences interact with specific i-docs, including how meaning is produced through interactivity in *Fort McMoney*, about Fort McMurray, an oil producing city in Alberta, Canada (Nogueira, 2015) and in *Bear 71*, which is about threats to grizzly bears in Banff National Park (also Alberta, Canada) (Nash, 2014b). However, such studies are more focused on qualitative experiences of participants solicited specifically to interact with these projects rather than on wider questions around the normal audiences of such projects and the geographies of distribution and consumption for i-docs. The limited investigations that have taken place suggest that interactive documentaries primarily reach younger audiences and those already involved in digital cultures; 'tech-savvy millennials: designers, programmers, film industry professionals, filmmakers, and other early-adopters' (Kaufman, 2013). Most of them have relatively

small numbers of viewers. In 2016, 300,000 viewers for an interactive documentary project over a four year period would have been considered a success, although many of these views would be brief visits to their websites, sometimes lasting less than five minutes. It has been suggested that, as a new medium, users are often unsure how to interact with interactive documentaries (Nash, 2014b), which have very different, and sometimes ambiguous, semantic and technological structures to traditional documentary, or how long to engage with one for; given they often have no fixed length.

Interactive documentaries then, seem to not yet have found a mainstream audience base beyond the world of ‘academia, creative and cultural institutions’ that ‘has developed around digital storytelling experiments’ (Cucinelli, et al., 2018). This enables them to remain a genre defined by experimentation, although codified conventions have been defined (Nash, 2017; Nash, 2014b; Aston & Gaudenzi, 2012). Most academic attention to the experiments of i-doc makers focus on their political agendas as a medium equipped to provide ‘new ways of engaging with social issues and opportunities for forms of self-representation’ (Nash, 2017: 9) as well as to foreground and foster responsibility and agency (Favero, 2013). However, the temporalities of i-docs, including the ways they construct the present, are also novel and experimental. Elsewhere, I’ve explored how their formal properties make them especially attuned to nonlinear spatiotemporality and have argued that analysing i-docs can help us to engage with the varied politics and implications of nonlinear spatiotemporal logics (Harris, 2016). Before detailing my own methodological experiments with interactive documentary I’ll briefly contextualise my project within some examples of commercial projects to show how the method is more widely used to engage with both present moments and present eras.

i-docs as Engagement with Presents

The i-doc making process is a process of practice-led research. Within my own work, thinking about how to design the i-doc’s interface – its infrastructure, aesthetics, and interactive capacities as well as the content and its curation – was simultaneously a process of thinking about the logics and implications of pop-up culture. The same approach to i-doc construction as a mode of grasping the mechanisms of an issue or

subject is evident in other i-doc projects too; including in relation to grasping the atmospheres and logics of present moments and present eras.

In my own i-Doc, as the next section explores, I experimented with features in order to express the affective atmosphere of immersion and ephemerality in the present moments generated by pop-up places. Some i-docs generate affective atmosphere through interactive elements. For example, *Thank you for Playing* (2017) about gambling, opens with a game, asking users to keep track of which of three chips has a heart icon on it as they're shuffled around. This interactive activity subsumes the user into the atmosphere of suspense and compulsive repetition that defines gambling. Others use the multimedia capacities of i-docs to create experiences of present moments, for example by contrasting still images with voiceovers. *Roxham* (2018) takes us to the moments when Royal Canadian Mounted Police intercept asylum seekers at the US/Canadian border. In the non VR version of the i-doc, still images of the silhouettes of asylum seekers at the border, normally with their hands up in surrender, are coupled with recordings of exchanges with border control officials. The still images juxtaposed with the unedited recordings give a sense of the intense atmosphere as asylum seekers are frozen in fear, and suddenly stripped of agency, as this pivotal moment unfolds around them. For other i-docs, the process of its curation and maintenance is in itself the process of keeping alive the atmosphere of a present moment. *18 Days in Egypt* (2015), created during the Arab Spring, captures an affective atmosphere of hope and possibility. It functions like a database, where people can upload their own footage or photos of their experiences of the uprising. Its tagline is 'You witnessed it, you recorded it. Now, let's write our country's history'; aligning participation with political participation, as interactive documentaries are often described to do (Aston, et al., 2017). Almost a decade on from the Arab Spring, at a time when the promises of the revolution have largely dissipated, *18 Days in Egypt* reminds users of the atmospheres that defined that present and attempts to retain its spirit. If hope can be a 'resource' (Anderson, 2014: 1) then *18 Days in Egypt* stores and restores that resource in a period when it's hard to hold on to.

As I also explore in the next section, considering the logics by which the component features of my i-doc should connect with one another enabled me to elucidate pop-

up's relationship to its present era; the structure of feeling within which it is operative. Again, this expression of structures of feeling – meanings and values as they are lived (Williams, 1977: 133), via the system of an interactive documentary is evident in other projects too. For example, *How to Create a Financial Crisis* (2017) uses a comic book style format that users click through to involve them in thinking about the meanings and values that emerged from and informed the crash of 2008. The interactive elements remind the user of their agency as a 'financial player' (as the project labels them), as they must engage in answering questions to progress to the next frames. However, the questions asked are all very leading and responses are usually limited to a choice between two glib answers. In this way, the interactive documentary echoes the structure of feeling of the present economic climate – of powerlessness on behalf of the public – by linking content with questions that seem key to the i-docs progression but are in fact epiphenomena. The comic book style evokes the frivolity with which financial elites play with risk, and thereby with the fates of ordinary people.

Many interactive documentaries use their own digital structures to reflect on the values and mechanisms of digital cultures in the present era in a meta-, self-referential way. For example, *Do Not Track* (2015) responds to anxiety about how data is used by big companies in the current era. It invites users to learn about the exchange value of their information and 'what is happening without your permission', mirroring the process by itself tracking the user's data while they engage with the project. *Seven Digital Deadly Sins* (2014) also speaks to the cultural logics of the digital age, examining "our modern-age sense of right and wrong" via an interface on which a web of icons are laid out that link to illustrated articles about how the seven deadly sins manifest in digital behaviours. The interface of *Seven Digital Deadly Sins* echoes and reproduces the experience of an 'internet wormhole'; a sprawling, addictive path of hyperlinked content. Both interactive documentaries evoke a structure of feeling defined by our anxiety about how internet technologies are changing the way that people and societies think, communicate and behave, and use their interactive and nonlinear formats to elucidate the mechanisms behind these changes.

Mediating Presents with interactive documentary as Method

In the rest of this paper I now turn to my methodological work with interactive documentaries. Having shown how commercial i-docs use their formal properties to engage with both present moments and present eras, I now discuss how making an interactive documentary as part of my research into London's pop-up culture enabled me to engage with its productions of present moments and present eras as well as, importantly, the connections between those two types of present.

Pop-up Culture

Pop-up culture is a trend for temporary and mobile spaces. Most centrally, it includes spaces of leisure and consumption, such as pop-up bars, restaurants, cinemas and shops. Recently, however, pop-up has expanded to include spaces of housing and welfare, including pop-up libraries, pop-up emergency accommodation and pop-up courts of law. Pop-up began as a 'compensatory' urban form (Harris, 2020) in the aftermath of the 2008 recession, responding to high vacancy rates and funding cuts by encouraging charities, creative groups and small businesses to temporarily occupy empty spaces while the economy recovered. However, while starting out as a better than nothing option in crisis times, it is now a highly popular kind of urbanism, used by big brands like Adidas or Fullers and incorporated within the urban place making strategies of most cities in the Global North.

Pop-up culture is interesting for producing particular kinds of present moments, with distinctive affective atmospheres including of immersion, interstitiality, flexibility, surprise and secrecy (Harris, 2015; 2020). As a phenomenon defined by ephemerality, pop-ups are performatively temporary and frequently promised to involve secret and surprising elements. Many pop-ups market themselves as immersive, garnering appeal from offering visitors sensory, haptic and imaginative experiences that often involve performances, themed decorations and outfits and/or the recreation of fictional or historical worlds. Pop-ups also cultivate an atmosphere of possibility, envisaging the city as a flexible fabric full of potential for change and strewn with interstitial spaces from which new activities and ideas can emerge.

Elsewhere I have argued that pop-up culture's logics and affective atmospheres work to normalize and glamorize precarity in the post 2008 city (Harris, 2020; 2015) by rebranding precarity's characteristics¹. This rebranding, I think, happens through a particular interaction between the affective atmospheres of pop-up and precarity as a structure of feeling. In his discussion of affective atmospheres, Ben Anderson (2009: 77) discusses a famous passage by Karl Marx and notes an intriguing question posed by Marx:

“although the atmosphere in which we live, weighs upon every one with a 20,000 lb. force, do you feel it?”

For me, the implications of this question are relevant to the atmospheres and structures of feeling produced by pop-up culture. I have argued that pop-up's affective atmospheres stop us from feeling precarity as a broader structure of feeling; instead transmuting the qualities of precarity so that they are experienced positively. For example, rather than experience instability, pop-up gives us flexibility; rather than experience uncertainty, it gives us surprise. As such, the localized present moments produced by pop-up culture – the atmospheres at its events – have a specific and important relationship to the structure of feeling of precarity in the present era; ensuring that precarity is not felt in full. In the rest of this section I detail how making an interactive documentary about pop-up culture helped me to explore this relationship.

Present Moments in the Temporary City

In designing the interactive documentary I thought carefully about how to give the user an experience of being present in the kind of affective atmospheres that pop-up cultivates. When you arrive there is a button saying 'enter' that takes you through to the main home page. The word 'enter' was chosen over 'next' (which I'd previously used) to evoke the immersive atmosphere of pop-up places. In pop-up culture, immersion can be understood as 'the sensation of entering a space that immediately identifies itself as somehow separate from the world' (Griffiths, 2013); the 'enter' button evokes this sense of entering a demarcated space. While this space is hosted online, the enter button signals to the visitor that another mode of attention is now required. The fact that you have to access the space via this initial page, as a kind of

gateway, also echoes how pop-ups demarcate themselves from other city spaces, generating an atmosphere of secrecy and interstitiality.

There are two options for how to access the interactive documentary's content. A category view allows users to browse all the clips available, sorted by three 'types'; clips about shipping container spaces, ones about supper clubs and others about pop-up cinemas. However, the user is encouraged to access the interactive documentary via the other route – 'play the pop-up city' – as this option is made larger on the home page. In this option, users are invited to 'Experience pop-ups as they come and go by clicking on the icons' or 'following suggested links at the ends of clips to continue with a common theme or aesthetic.' Users are also warned not to 'expect to catch all the pop-ups first go.' From here, another button, labelled 'explore' takes users through to the play page.

On this page, icons signalling video clips are displayed on an adjusted map of London. There are three kinds of icon signalling the three kinds of pop-up I focused on; container spaces, pop-up cinemas and supper clubs. A calendar at the bottom of the page marks the passage of time, as icons appear and disappear across the map, signalling places popping up and down. The user has from January 1st until December 31st to explore the temporary city, a window that lasts ten minutes of 'real' time.

Clicking on an icon opens up a video about the place it pertains to. Some videos are interviews with the owners of pop-ups while others are exploratory clips about a pop-up place or event. Each has a caption that briefly explains the context. At the end of each clip links are offered that allow the user to continue following a theme or aesthetic from the clip just watched, or to see what's happening 'outside the temporary city' (a feature discussed later). They can also choose to go back to the map. For example, the clip about Backyard Cinema, a pop-up film screening event in a church, ends with options to "Open More of London's closed doors", 'Continue Exploring the Temporary City' or 'see what's happening outside the temporary city.'

The turning pages of the calendar and the coming and goings of the clips evoke the atmosphere of ephemerality and flexibility in pop-up culture. The pace of these processes is deliberately set fast enough that users are unable to watch all the clips

available in one sitting. After watching a video about one pop-up, the user will return to the map to find that others they had planned to watch have now disappeared. Unable to keep up, the user is then forced to choose, somewhat haphazardly, between the rapidly vanishing options, generating a sense of unpredictability and surprise that is at once stimulating and anxiety inducing; a key element of pop-up's affective atmospheres.

Having icons rather than still images representing the clips available evokes the atmosphere of secrecy in pop-up culture. Many pop-ups are branded as 'secret'; including the prominent pop-up cinema company 'Secret Cinema' as well as many 'secret supper clubs'. The secrecy imaginary presents pop-up events as parallel to but separate from more routine city spaces. This is evoked in the interactive documentary by how the user can't tell from the icon what the clip will be about, as well as by the way that the neon pop-up icons stand out from the muted blue background. The ability to move between pop-ups by following thematic links at the end of clips also suggests the temporary city as a network of connected places, joined by their affiliation with the aesthetics and sentiments of pop-up culture; an inner circle accessed by those with the right cultural capital.

As well as using the design and capacities of the interface to evoke the common affective atmospheres of pop-up culture, the editing of the clips themselves engages with particular versions of this atmosphere at different types of pop-up event. This is clear in the editing of the clip about 'Pulp Kitchen'. Pulp Kitchen was an immersive cinema screening of the film *Pulp Fiction* at which spectators were given snacks and drinks to eat at different points in the film; ones that correlated to particular scenes or actions. For example, guests were given a shot of alcohol in a syringe to consume at the point in the film where the character Mia is given an adrenaline shot following a drug overdose. In producing this clip I wanted to engage with how the event cultivated a sense of immersion in the film by linking the on-screen with off-screen events through the consumption of food and drink; making watching the film a bodily experience. Simply showing my footage of people watching the film and consuming the food and drinks wouldn't have captured how, for a person attending the event, this action felt tied up with the action of the film so I experimented with ways to convey this interconnection of real and reel space. I decided that part of the

clip would be made up of juxtaposed still images of the snacks/drinks given to guests and their on-screen correlates, introduced with gunshot sounds to give a sense of dynamism and integrate them into the *Pulp Fiction* aesthetic of the event. The edit aimed to express the particularities of the immersive atmosphere produced at Pulp Kitchen.

Editing the clips also enabled me to bring out commonalities in the material elements that constitute the atmospheres of pop-ups. In sifting through my footage of supper clubs, for example, I became interested in the doors of the different places in which they were held. In public sites of consumption doorways are usually clearly sign-posted, left open, made of transparent glass or in some other way marked to attract customers. However, because supper clubs are normally hosted in private spaces the doorways are not designed to be inviting to an unknown stranger and this is part of what gives supper club culture its atmosphere of secrecy. I made sure, therefore, to include establishing shots of doorways, or shots of doors to supper clubs opening in the supper club clips, to foreground this shared experience of entering the space-time of a supper club; stepping through an unmarked door.

The Temporary City and the Present Era

As well as evoking the localized affective atmospheres experienced by those present at pop-up places, I also sought in the interactive documentary to engage with the role that pop-up plays in the broader structures of feeling in the present era. In particular, the interactive documentary critically explores the relationship of pop-up to precarity as a structure of feeling that is definitive of life today. Precarity has been identified as a central experience in the present era (Berlant, 2011; Anderson, 2014; Anderson, 2016) and a reality that has now encroached into traditionally privileged middle class communities as well the lives of groups that have longer histories of disenfranchisement and insecurity. Elsewhere I have argued that pop-up culture is both emergent from the precarity that has hit London, and other cities of the Global North, since the 2008 crash, as well as reproductive of it (Harris, 2020). The concept of ‘meanwhile use’ of vacant spaces emerged from the high vacancy rates and landscapes of dereliction following the 2008 crash, and temporary place making appealed to charities, creative groups and small businesses unable to access funding

or generate revenue in this period of recession and austerity. As well as being a *result* of precarity though, pop-up is also a means by which precarity is disguised and exacerbated. In the direct aftermath of recession, pop-ups covered up the gaps in urban space use that would otherwise signify the scale of the crisis and, in the years since, pop-ups have made temporary and unpredictable forms of labour (and more recently housing and welfare (Harris et. al. 2018) seem not just acceptable but even desirable. As I mentioned earlier and have argued elsewhere, pop-up's logics work to mute and transfigure experiences of precarity, normalizing and glamorizing it so that insecure ways of living and working appear as actively appealing (Harris, 2020). For example, pop-up places make insecure labour, in what would traditionally be blue collar roles such as bike mending, baking or hair dressing, attractive to university educated, middle class millennials; reframing these vocations as aspirational, hipster activities rather than as downward social mobility (Ocejo, 2017).

Some of the interactive features of my interactive documentary are intended to express pop-up's relationship to and role in contemporary conditions of precarity. One means of doing this is by using interactivity to mirror the burden pop-up places on workers with a burden placed on i-doc users. Pop-up exacerbates labour precarity, partly by normalizing the idea that work in the creative and cultural industries (as well as more broadly) should be temporary and partly by expecting more of workers, shifting the onus onto them for rejuvenating declining spaces in the aftermath of recession; even though the place rebranding enacted by pop-ups only serves to displace those pop-up businesses when higher value land users return. This weight of expectation on the labour of pop-up workers is echoed in the i-doc by the labour required of the user to keep *The Temporary City* functioning. In the play option, time doesn't begin to pass (the calendar pages don't turn) until the user starts watching a clip. Without their involvement, time stands still so that the i-doc as 'an independent and standalone artefact does not exist' (Gaudenzi, 2013: 14). This gives the user power in a sense; a power that reflects how pop-up in some ways democratizes decision making over urban places. However, it also foregrounds the burden of being involved in the interactive documentary, or in pop-up. The necessity of the user to perform work in order for the interactive documentary to function reflects the onus put on individuals by pop-up culture to keep the city functioning at a time of

recession and austerity. Vacant spaces are animated and revitalized, only to raise their value in ways that benefit housing developers.

Other features of the interactive documentary engage users more explicitly with how pop-up culture produces and reproduces precarity, not only for pop-up workers but for those displaced by the gentrification and redevelopment that pop-up paves the way for. The ‘outside the temporary city’ boxes (collages of text and images made in Adobe Photoshop) that I referred to earlier do a large part of this work. As noted previously, they’re offered to users as options at the end of certain clips. The boxes highlight processes that pop-up is involved in but that are not acknowledged within pop-up’s promotion and self-representation. These processes include gentrification as well as the normalization of precarious labour (Graziano & Ferreri, 2014; Ferreri, 2015).

To give one example, the clip about The Artworks, a shipping container mall occupying a vacant site awaiting redevelopment, ends with an option to see ‘outside the temporary city’. The illustrated box that opens up explains how the mall occupies the site of the former Heygate Estate, one of Europe’s largest social housing estates which between 2011 and 2014 was controversially decanted, sold at a loss by the council then knocked down to be turned into expensive flats, displacing its residents far across London and beyond. It offers a critical insight into the functions of the artworks, showing how the container mall is being used by the developers, Lend Lease, to babysit the site while they ready it for construction, while also rebranding it to attract the upper middle class buyers the new flats are aimed at.

The information given in the ‘outside the temporary city’ boxes problematizes the suggestion that pop-up’s transformation of sites are ‘temporary’, as the icons coming and going from the interface might otherwise suggest. While pop-up culture celebrates the supposed flexibility and openness of the city and promises democratized place making, the box described above demonstrates how the participatory spirit of pop-up for pop-up workers can be co-opted and deployed in processes of forced eviction and displacement. The critical interjection is aided by the aesthetics of the illustrated box which depicts a version of the ‘streets in the sky’ that characterise post-WW2 social housing and its utopic vision of urban community (Borges & Marat-Mendes, 2019). Here, however, the streets in the sky are made up

of several fragments of different images of the Heygate Estate, spliced together inexactly, and with a chunk of the image removed and replaced with white gaps, so that the streets appear precarious and perplexing. One pillar of the collaged structure is ungrounded, floating instead above a glossy image of London's skyline; the version of London desired by developers. The collage also features the famous "Now Here" graffiti that came to epitomize Heygate, a commentary on the estate and its inhabitants as both present and nowhere, socially displaced even before their physical removal.



The interactive documentary's ending picks up the same critical thread as the 'outside the temporary city' box described above. After ten minutes in the 'play' page the users' explorations are interrupted by another pop-up window which takes over the whole screen. The box is made up of collaged developers' images of glossy new housing blocks, as well as images of workmen on scaffolding affixed to the sides of the buildings. The text informs users that 'your time in pop-up city is up. Development is due to commence.' It instructs them instead to 'visit pop-up city showrooms for information about our one, two or three bed properties and penthouse apartments.' Albeit somewhat crudely, the ending highlights the teleological progression of the pop-up city towards gentrification; it reveals pop-up as a landscape of apparent flexibility and openness that in reality is subservient to a domineering agenda and trajectory.

Connecting Present Moments and Present Eras

The two sections above have explored how making an interactive documentary enabled me to engage with and communicate two kinds of present in pop-up culture; the particular present moments it constructs and the present era, defined by precarity, that it is instrumental in. Importantly, my i-doc also aimed to illuminate the relationship between these two kinds of present, using the interactive experience to enliven my argument that pop-up culture's logics both emerge from but also rebrand precarity in the present era, so that it becomes not just palatable but desirable (Harris, 2020).

Other scholarship on affective atmospheres and structure of feeling has pointed towards this intersection, illuminating how localized affects and broader structures of feeling interact. These interactions can involve contestation or reinforcement. Esther Hitchen (2019) points towards how localized atmospheres and broader structures of feeling can reinforce each other. She explores how atmospheres of paranoia at a council library are driven by a wider structure of feeling of precarity, and also reproduce that structure of feeling, as the anxiety of the library staff becomes part of a palpable national mood of insecurity and anxiety under austerity. Isabel Airas (2018), on the other hand, describes how, during Corbyn's campaign to become Labour leader, affective 'hotspots' – at key campaign events – were able to counter

pervasive negative affects circulating in the contemporary condition; feelings of disenfranchisement and frustration. Hotspots, as theorized by Airas, are particularly intense affective atmospheres that have the power to influence the trajectories of a broader mood or structure of feeling. Pop-up places, as we'll see, can be understood as hotspots in this sense; generating affectively charged present moments that alter the overall sense of the present era.

In my interactive documentary the connection between the affective atmospheres of pop-ups and precarity as a structure of feeling is brought out by the outside the temporary city boxes and the ways they illuminate elements of the clips. One clip is about *The Floating Cinema*, a pop-up cinema on a purpose-built canal barge. The clip explores an event at which a sound artist had come to work with people in Brentford, as part of the creation of a piece of sound art about life along waterways. The editing of the clip is intended to engage viewers with the type of immersive atmosphere curated by *The Floating Cinema*. Unlike other immersive cinemas, like *Secret Cinema*, that construct versions of fictional worlds, immersion in *The Floating Cinema* means bringing an immersive way of seeing to 'real' space, inviting visitors to engage more deeply and viscerally with their everyday surroundings. The clip shows how the sound artist generates this immersive way of seeing. It begins with a sound boom being brushed around a bush, but the audio in the clip is not the audio the boom is picking up. The boom is attached to headphones worn by myself, off screen. Instead of being invited to listen to these enhanced sounds, the viewer is made to wonder about their qualities when the artist, removing the boom from the bush, asks 'how was that?'; suggesting a layer of immersion that only those actually present at the event were privy to. Similarly, the clip later shows another participant rattling a fence while listening to the noises coming through his headphones with a curiosity and fascination that seem bizarre given the mundanity of the sound as captured in the clip.

Elsewhere in the clip we see how the sound artist mobilizes the enhanced auditory perception and immersive atmospheres of the event towards critical agendas. He has constructed a list of sounds to record, aided by suggestions from passers-by and the public via twitter. The list includes things such as "trains, boats, wildlife" but also more intangible experiences of "austerity, apathy, capitalism" and elements of the

soundscape like “accents” that speak to how Brentford has changed over recent years.

In the background, beyond the workshop, we can see an estate agent showing somebody around a showroom for flats at Brentford Lock West, a development of high-spec flats on the waterside. The developers had actually sponsored The Floating Cinema’s event, granting them the space to run it. While I was observing the workshop, one participant went to record the sounds of the builders working on the new flats and returned to tick off ‘gentrification’ from the artist’s list. This foregrounded an obvious tension, where an atmosphere of critical immersion enabled by the sound artist was being facilitated by the very forces it was trying to be critical of. This tension is highlighted in one of the ‘outside the temporary city’ boxes that you can reach as a link from the clip of Floating Cinema. The box conflates images of gentrification from across London. It shows the estate agent from Brentford gesturing towards the London Orbital (a symbol of the Olympic Games-led gentrification of East London), highlighting the redevelopment at Brentford as one instance of a wider process of London’s rebranding and gentrification.

The middle-classes have also become more precarious since the 2008 crash, and under austerity measures and rising housing costs they have been pushed further out of the city to areas like Brentford. This displacement of course leads to a knock-on effect of displacing London’s poorer residents, as costs of living in these once undesirable areas go up too. Creative projects like The Floating Cinema that aim to bring cultural activities to deprived areas can then become entrained with this displacement process as although they target ‘harder to reach’ communities – as they put it – they are appealing to the typically more middle-class communities arriving in such peripheral areas. These newcomers to the area can themselves feel precarious, as they acclimatise to revised expectations of where in the city they can live, and also have much to gain from immersive events like those held by The Floating Cinema, as they seek to form attachments to place. Yet in appealing to this incoming community, these kind of events can counterproductively end up undermining feelings of belonging for those already there and exacerbating the conditions that force them out.

The way that interactive documentary foregrounds *The Floating Cinema*'s part in this illuminates the contradictory relationship between the kind of present moments it produces and its role in the wider workings of the present era. While the floating cinema creates affective atmospheres defined by critical immersion, the interactive documentary suggests that these critical potentials somewhat fall flat in the face of the overwhelming force of gentrification, serving only to distract from it and compensate for its displacements by offering fleeting moments of engagement with the social histories of places that many people will soon be pushed out of. Moreover, the events can quicken the displacement process, by enhancing the appeal of the area for those who can no longer afford more central or upmarket locations. Indeed, the estate agent pictured in the clip has no doubt arranged viewings to coincide with the art workshop, so that he can demonstrate the area's cultural activities to prospective buyers.

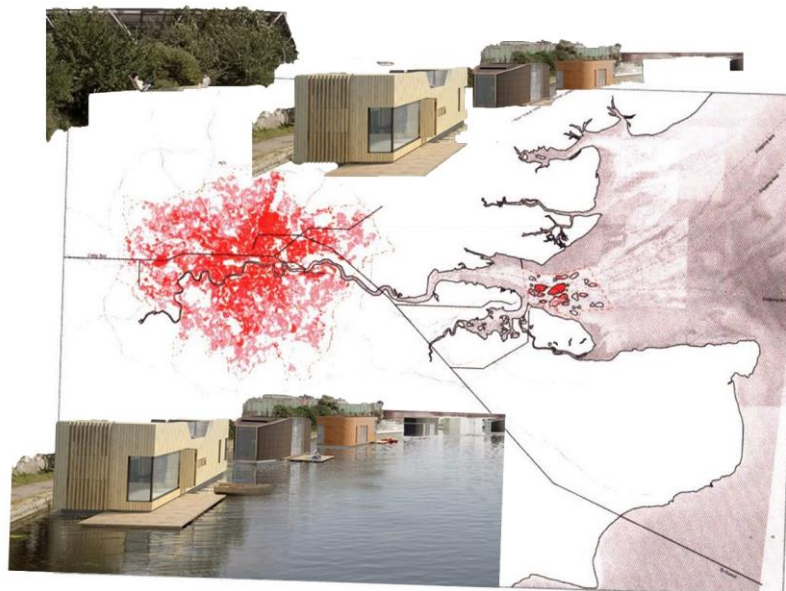
Other potential user experiences in the interactive documentary illustrate similar connections between present moments and the present era. One of the options offered at the end of *The Floating Cinema* clip is to 'follow the river', a link that takes users to a clip about *The Ship's Kitchen*; a supper club on a house boat in Barking. The clip shows how the boat owner has used the 'quirkiness' of the supper club's location on his house boat as a core part of the event's appeal. As the clip begins we hear the drum roll of Scottish drums that we will later learn are from a band entertaining guests at this Burns Night themed supper club event². The camera moves rapidly towards the door of the barge as the drum roll progresses and finally, as it culminates, my hand emerges from behind the camera to open the door. This build-up of suspense makes entering the boat an exciting experience; an intense present moment defined by an atmosphere of secrecy and surprise, enabled by the unusual location.

However, the 'outside the temporary city' box connected to this clip sheds a different light on the supper club's location, linking it to London's housing crisis. The collage in the box uses images taken from *New London Architecture*'s catalogue of architectural designs that can (supposedly) ease London's housing crisis. It specifically uses ones that involve developments of housing on the waterways, including propositions to create 'waterhoods' that will turn 'generation rent' into

'generation float.' In light of this 'outside the temporary city' box, we can see the house boat where The Ship's Kitchen supper club takes place as evidence of young people forced into compensatory forms of housing (Harris, 2020), such as moving onto a house boat in Barking. The feelings of secrecy and surprise cultivated at the supper club, then, are feelings that divert from and compensate for the diminished housing aspirations of adults coming of age after the 2008 crash. The affective atmosphere of the supper club offers an experience that mutes the precarity of the housing crisis as a structure of feeling, which might otherwise be felt intensely, enabling the host's housing situation to be received, in part at least, as exciting and unusual. This is a key function of pop-up culture; the generation of affective atmospheres that transfigure a structure of feeling of precarity running through the years following the 2008 recession, generating optimism and enthusiasm regardless of ongoing insecurity.

OUTSIDE POP-UP CITY

The housing crisis is pushing increasing numbers of young Londoners onto the waterways



Architects have proposed that 'colonising' the waterways is a good solution to the this crisis of affordability. Generation rent can become 'generation float'. They can live in 'waterhoods' surrounded by flexible, floating architecturs; or they can move to the "34th Borough" envisaged in the Thames Estuary.

Conclusions

My interactive documentary then, sought to engage with the atmospheres produced by pop-up culture, illuminating both the experiences of being present at particular pop-ups and the atmosphere of pop-up culture as a whole; typified by immersion, secrecy, surprise, flexibility, interstitiality and ephemerality. However, it also sought to engage with a structure of feeling that because of pop-up's atmospheres, can go somewhat unnoticed; one of precarity. As the interactive documentary examined, the jubilant atmospheres of pop-up culture transmute the conditions of precarity that it is founded in and reproduces, enabling them to be experienced positively. In this way, making it allowed me to think through the nature of the connection between the affective atmospheres present at pop-ups, as localized space-times, and the structure of feelings that define the present era, which pop-up is instrumental in.

The ability to connect differently scaled elements of 'the present' is rooted in the specificities of interactive documentary as a method and as a means of communication. As the examples discussed in this paper illustrate, interactive documentary typically organises collections of content which connect to a broader overall experience. Interactive documentary creation requires the production of individual bits of content, but also attention to how (and why) that content should be organised and linked within a broader interface. It therefore inherently requires contemplation of the relationship between particular moments and the more pervasive logics and feelings that those moments are part of. Crucially, this connection is nonlinear, the broader experience of the interactive documentary emerges from the combination of its contents, but the content is also read through and altered by the feelings and logics of the experience as a totality. Equally, the connection is not necessarily one of reinforcement, as well as supporting the overall mood or message of an interactive documentary, individual pieces of content can also work to contradict or transform that wider totality. These formal qualities of interactive documentary, I argue, can help us to understand the multiple ways in which the affective atmospheres of present moments and the structures of feeling of the present era can interact; an interaction that can be typified by reinforcement, contradiction, or transformation.

As scholars increasingly look to concepts of affect, atmosphere and structure of feeling to understand the workings of the present, it is crucial to interrogate the way these differently scaled elements interact. In this paper I have begun some of this work, showing how interactive documentary is an approach that can help to elucidate these relationships. As I have shown, it is adept at communicating the particular atmospheres of present moments as well as the broader logics and senses of a present era. Most crucially, though, it can shed light on why it is important to attend to these two types of present together. Looking at how present moments and present eras connect reveals the complex, politicized processes that govern what elements of the present are felt; processes that undergird how collective life is encountered and reproduced.

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Notes

¹ For a fuller account of how pop-up's affective atmospheres interact and glamorize precarity, as well as of how precarity is glamorized through other culture and practices, see Harris, 2020.

² A celebration of the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

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